
Multiple Choice Exams

In order to minimize confusion and anxiety with multiple choice exams, try following a systematic approach, as outlined below.

1. Cover the answers

2. Read each question or stem carefully

It often takes more than one reading to understand a question. To help decode the question:

- underline key words;
- rephrase the question in your own words; and
- name the concept from which the question is derived.

3. Try to answer each question before looking at the choices

If you determine the answer before you look at the choices, you lessen the possibility of becoming confused.

4. Uncover the answers one at a time

Use a systematic process of elimination by putting a:

- ✓ beside the answer if you think it is correct
- X beside the answer if you think it is incorrect
- ? beside the answer if you are unsure

Generally (but not always), the choices given for multiple choice questions include:

- Distracter: an answer similar to the right answer, but incorrect
- The correct answer, if certain conditions apply
- The correct answer
- A “clearly” incorrect answer

Do not get trapped by:

- Jargon: words that sound impressive but are not the correct answer
- Familiar phrases from the course but are not the correct answer

5. If you are unsure, go with your hunch

Stay with your hunch unless something later in the exam leads you to a better answer. If you do not even have a hunch, guess, unless you will be penalized for doing so.

Sample Multiple Choice Question

Which of the following study skills is most likely to result in success?

- a) Determining which chapters will be on the test
- b) Reading the headings and subheadings in your textbook while reading it
- c) Putting the textbook under your pillow the night before the exam
- d) Using the headings and subheadings in your textbook while reading it

Sample answering strategy:

Which of the following study skills is most likely to result in success?

"I can't really answer this one until I see the choices of study skills, but I know the course has constantly emphasized two principles: be active rather than passive, and choose what works for you."

- a) X "This would help, but not much because knowing what chapters will be on the test does not mean that you necessarily learn anything in those chapters."
- b) ? "Possible correct answer"
- c) X "Nobody learns by osmosis"
- d) ? "Possible correct answer"

"B and D are very similar. Simply 'reading' the headings is not as active or as powerful as 'using' the headings, so D is 'most likely' to lead to success."